

**Federal Personnel Manual System****FPM Letter 920-13****SUBJECT:** Continuing Development of Senior Executives

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**RETAIN UNTIL SUPERSEDED**

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Heads of Departments and Independent Establishments:

1. Purpose. This letter provides general guidance to help agencies establish and administer programs for the continuing development of senior executives.

2. Authority.

a. 5 USC 3396 states that "The Office Of Personnel Management shall establish programs...for the continuing development of senior executives, or require agencies to establish such programs which meet criteria prescribed by the Office."

b. 5 CFR 412.107(a) states that "Overall planning and management of the agency executive and management development program(s) shall be provided by a departmental or independent agency executive resources board or a complex of executive boards at agency and subordinate levels."

c. 5 CFR 412.107(d) states that systems for the continuing development of SES members shall:

- (1) Include preparation, implementation, and regular updating of an individual development plan for each SES member, to be approved by the appropriate executive resources board. These plans shall be tied to the performance appraisal cycle and focus on the enhancement of existing competencies as well as the correction of deficiencies identified in performance appraisals, and on preparing SES members for future assignments; and
- (2) Result in developmental experiences for SES members which, through continuing short-term opportunities and periodic involvement in longer-term programs, will:
  - (i) Help to meet organizational needs for managerial improvement and increased productivity;
  - (ii) Help SES members to keep up-to-date in professional, technical, managerial, sociological, economic and political areas; and
  - (iii) Meet the individual needs of SES members for growth and development--intellectually and personally; and
- (3) Include provisions for executive sabbaticals for carefully selected members as provided for by subsection (c) of section 3396 of title 5, United States Code.

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\*Not yet issued

3. Recommended Minimum Requirements. We recommend that agencies establish a minimum development requirement for career senior executives who are two years or more from retirement eligibility. For example, an agency might require that such career executives:

a. Participate in a minimum of ten days of formal development focused on enhancement of executive competencies every five years; and

b. Complete one on-the-job developmental experience (committee or task force assignment, detail to another position, special project, etc.) every three years.

4. Agency Action. Agencies are establishing their executive and management development programs in accordance with OPM criteria in 5 CFR 412 and plans approved by OPM. During the first two years of the Senior Executive Service, OPM guidance and most agency plans focused on the design and installation of SES candidate development programs. Now we must more seriously address other components of the program. Executive and management development plan updates for FY 1982 should reflect significant steps toward the comprehensive SES member development programs which the law and regulation require.

5. Why Continuing Development is Needed. A variety of factors bear upon the need for continuing development of SES members:

a. The executive environment is highly complex and is becoming more complex. Increasing numbers of laws affect more than one Federal agency as well as state and local governments and the private sector. Executives must understand and respond to the needs of different and often conflicting clientele groups;

b. All SES members face increasing pressure to manage better and to improve productivity. This calls for a continuing effort to keep management skills up to date;

c. In the past, it was possible for individuals to rise through professional ranks as a result of technical excellence and to be selected for executive positions in spite of limited management experience. Through trial and error and through formal development efforts, many of these individuals have become excellent executives. However, some SES members have limited backgrounds in management;

d. Many individuals serve as executives for 15 years or longer. A recent OPM study established that 24 per cent of career executives received their initial executive appointment before they were 40 and nearly 52 per cent became executives before they were 45. We can expect many if not most of these executives to serve in the SES until they are 55 or older. Developmental efforts should not stop long before these individuals reach the end of their careers;

e. Many SES members are professionals who must continually update their technical or highly specialized knowledge in order to exercise sound judgment on policy and program matters and to maintain the respect and support of professional peers and subordinates;

f. Much of the work executives do is inherently developmental, since executives are forced to grow to keep up with their challenging jobs. However, this unplanned growth often leaves gaps -- that is, competency areas which are important to optimum executive performance are frequently left undeveloped.

g. SES mobility options create new developmental needs. The significant increases in executive mobility which are inherent in the concept of a Senior Executive Service call for broader, more flexible executives and, thus, for systematic development to prepare executives for their next assignments;



h. Improving executive performance can have a multiplying effect by improving the effectiveness of subordinate managers; and

i. Without opportunities for renewal and reflection, some executives will burn out from the constant pressure to produce and others will grow stale in jobs which no longer challenge them.

6. Responsibility for SES Member Development. Responsibility for SES member development is shared by the individual executive, the agency executive resources board and OPM, with each playing an important role. The most critical role, by far, is played by the SES member. However, the SES member cannot perform this role adequately unless there is a reliable system which makes available services from the agency and OPM. Responsibilities of the three parties are outlined below:

a. SES Member. A senior executive cannot be developed by an agency. An executive can choose to develop himself or herself within the context of a broad, continuing development system; or he or she can fall behind as the demands upon Federal executives steadily grow and change. The SES member:

(1) Accepts responsibility for his or her own development and keeps informed of developmental opportunities and services available through the agency, OPM, professional organizations, universities and the private sector;

(2) Assesses personal competencies against competencies required for optimum performance in current and/or prospective executive positions;

(3) Prepares and periodically updates an individual development plan in consultation with his or her supervisor. (This requirement for an individual development plan could be met by appending a very brief listing of developmental objectives and specific proposed developmental actions to each senior executive's annual performance plan. There is no need for an elaborate paperwork system. Unusual circumstances might make it inappropriate to expend further time or funds on development. Such circumstances should be noted.);

(4) Negotiates with agency management for needed developmental assignments, education and training, and ensures that the developmental activities take place;

(5) Participates with other SES members in policy and management seminars sponsored by the agency, OPM, professional organizations, universities and others;

(6) Keeps fully informed regarding modern management practices; and

(7) Maintains professional or technical competence necessary for optimum job performance;

b. Agency Executive Resources Board. Overall planning and management of an agency's program for the continuing development of senior executives is, by regulation, the responsibility of the agency's executive resources board or boards. This entails, among other things, establishing a management climate which fosters and facilitates the continuing growth of executives so that they will better manage agency programs. Thus, the Board:

(1) Issues policy for, designs and manages an agency SES member development program. (Such programs would usually be operated centrally but in large agencies might be decentralized to the bureau or activity level. Attachment 1 provides examples of the wide variety of activities which might be included within a development program for SES members.);

- (2) Ensures that there will be adequate funding and staff support for continuing SES member development;
  - (3) Creates the expectation that continuing SES member development will take place because it will improve long-term organizational performance;
  - (4) Involves top management officials in the development of SES members;
  - (5) Ensures that there are systems to assist SES members in planning for their development (e.g., establishes a system for appending a very brief individual development plan to each executive's annual performance plan, identifies executive competencies which are most important for mission accomplishment, provides assessment center or other assessment services, provides development counseling, etc.);
  - (6) Ensures that needed information is provided to SES members through agency policy and management seminars and luncheons as well as through newsletters, special bulletins or other means; and
  - (7) Ensures that planned development and planned reassignment of SES members are coordinated.
- c. OPM. Various SES member development functions and services which are mandated by law or are most cost efficient when provided centrally are the responsibility of OPM. Thus, OPM:
- (1) Establishes a government-wide framework for the continuing development of SES members and issues criteria governing agency programs and supplemental guidance;
  - (2) Approves and monitors agency programs for the continuing development of senior executives;
  - (3) Operates the Federal Executive Institute which provides a core executive education program to selected SES members as well as other development programs for executives;
  - (4) Provides policy seminars and information services to ensure that SES members in Washington and in the field are informed regarding Administration policies;
  - (5) Coordinates with the many deliverers of education and training (universities, nonprofit institutions, private vendors, etc.) to ensure that the developmental needs of Federal executives are understood;
  - (6) Operates a central clearinghouse of information on opportunities for SES member development;
  - (7) Assists agencies in the design and installation of SES member development programs;
  - (8) Assists in arranging permanent or temporary interagency assignments for SES members; and

- (9) Conducts research on Federal executive competencies and how they are best acquired and maintained.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'D' followed by a horizontal line and a small upward stroke.

Donald J. Devine  
Director

Attachment



### Possible SES Member Development Activities

Continuing development for SES members includes many things, large and small -- an 11-month sabbatical as well as an hour a week devoted to books and articles on management; attending a professional conference as well as switching assignments to be better prepared to take on the top job later. A partial list of activities which might be included in a program of continuing development for SES members follows:

#### a. Short-Term And Part-Time Development

- Committee, task force and special project assignments
- Policy and management luncheons
- Agency SES conferences
- Administration sponsored policy and management seminars
- Management skill training
- Interpersonal skill training
- Federal Executive Institute 3-week and shorter programs
- University, nonprofit and private sector short programs for executives
- Congressional seminars
- Part-time university degree and non-degree programs
- Professional meetings and conferences
- Assessment centers and other assessment instruments
- Coaching and modeling
- Structured reading programs
  - + Management subjects
  - + Professional subjects
- Executive team building
  - + Teams of executives
  - + An executive and subordinate executives and managers
- Civic activities

#### b. Long-Term Development

- Permanent reassignment to another SES position for developmental purposes
- Detail to another SES position for several months or more





- Federal Executive Institute 7-week Senior Executive Education program
- Long-term university education programs
  - + Sloan, Harvard etc., executive education programs
  - + Management, professional and technical programs which serve executives and others
- Congressional Fellows and LEGIS Programs
- Presidential Exchange Program (private sector)
- IPA assignment -- assignments with state or local governments or with non-profit organizations under the authority of the Intergovernmental Personnel Act
- Assignments with international organizations
- Sabbaticals
  - + Work experience
  - + Independent research
  - + Formal academic study
  - + Special projects or combination of the above